

Connecting the Dots: Wildfire, Forest Health, and Sustainable Rural Economies

**Notes from the Webposium Oakhurst Regional Discussion
October 29th, 2009**

Hosted by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy

OAKHURST

Attendees: (partial list only)

- Chris Baker-Yosemite Gateway Partners, East. Madera Economic Development Council
- Marilyn Lidyoff-Mariposa County
- David Konno-Yosemite Sequoia RC&D
- Brittany Dyer-Yosemite Sequoia RC&D
- Taylor Kornman-Yosemite Sequoia RC&D
- Les Marsden, Congressional Candidate
- Steve Miller-Coarsegold Chamber of Commerce
- Jeannie Habben – Chowchilla/Fresno Watershed
- Kevin Cann- Mariposa County Board of Supervisors
- Kathy McCorry-Oakhurst Chamber of Commerce
- Ronald Mackie-Sierra Club CA
- Taro Pusina-Yosemite National Park (fire)
- Larry Ballew
- Elissa Brown-Elissa Brown Consulting
- Len McKenzie-Mariposa RCD
- Jeannie Habben - Watershed Council,
- Keira Hayward-Ready-Set-Go Madera
- Mark Lemon - US Forest Service,
- Anne Lombardo - UC Cooperative Extension
- Steve Miller-Coarsegold Chamber of Commerce
- Jill Moss-North Fork Community Development Council
- Shay Overton-Provost & Pritchard Consulting
- Megan Redding-Mariposa Fire Safe Council
- Erick Robertson-Alpine Sierra Mill
- Sonja Satelo-Ready-Set-Go Madera
- Lyle Turpin – Mariposa County Supervisor
- Laura Cortez- CA Indian Manpower Consortium, INC.
- Juan Ramirez, Gavriela Navarro, Kiera Heyward, Jorge Olivera, Gerardo Garcia, Lucio Avila, Sonia Sotelo, Eugene Bell, Ruby Martinez---Ready, Set, Go Program
- Gary Wuchner-Yosemite National Park (fire)
- Steve Haze-Sierra RCD/SJV Leadership Forum
- Terry McLaughlin-Upper Merced River Watershed Committee
- Christi Hansard-North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians of CA
- Leon Manich-Cal Reforestation
- Sierra Smith-Yosemite National Park (resources) Dawn Afman – USDA-NRCS
- Tom Wheeler-Madera County Supervisor
- Brittany (Americorps)

1. From the morning panel discussions, what resonated for you?

The speakers were very relevant and there was a lot of information.

2. What is your vision of success?

- Biomass power plants in eastern Madera County that use local and forest biomass.

- Creating defensible space, reducing pollution, creating positive clean energy and jobs.
- Reopening all mills, co-generation and bio diesel plants.
- Incentives to reduce, reuse, and use inputs from land fills, especially green waste.
- Disposing low elevation fuels
- A project where a contract crew is hired, goes out to “at risk” residents homes (low income, seniors, disabled) and does their defensible space work, chips brush, and loads it into a truck to haul to location where fuels can be turned into useable energy.
- Inter tribal economic development and training programs with projects for Native American communities.
- Job creation, water quality, and water quantity
- Selective timber harvesting for pre-fabricated affordable housing (like the Hoopa housing pre fabrication operations)
- A coalition to reverse the flow of water to the San Joaquin River for salmon and redirect water to farmers to grow food.
- A canopy tree walk in the forest.

3. What is our “starting point for action”? Local capacity:

- Local/Regional wood pellet production - California based
- Yosemite-Sequoia RC&D has a person working on capacity building. The RC&D can secure funds, write grants, and provide technical assistance, and conduct feasibility studies. They are currently working with the Mono Nation to get a community chipping program that targets senior and disabled tribe members.
- Ready, Set, Go – provides job placement (Madera County) and training, offers support, and has worked with Coarsegold RCD. Projects with green jobs are being done right now include cleaning up recreational parks, planting new trees, visiting elementary schools and teaching young kids about what it means to go green.
- Cal Fire- establishes fire breaks during the winter. The equipment and operations are available now.
- Chawanakee Learning Center in Eastern Fresno County has a water system funded thru Fresno Sierra Resource Conservation District (RCD)
- Dept of Conservation has a watershed coordinator doing Arundo Removal in the valley
- Madera Region Integrated Regional Water Management Plan- is complete and formation of a stakeholder group is in process.
- Upper San Joaquin River Stewardship Council and Watershed Assessment – Sierra RCD
- San Joaquin River Stewardship Program – This is a community based initiative. The Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley are funded. The Sierra RCD & San Joaquin Valley Leadership Forum
- Fresno River Watershed Assessment - Partial funding was received again
- Other models - There are successful models elsewhere - Collins Pine, Cedar Mill, Shaver Lake – So Cal Edison

4. What are the barriers or hurdles to overcome?

Pre – Project due diligence/research:

- *Cost of permits.* Where does the money go? Why can’t money barriers be reduced?
- *Funding* - Lack of funding for grant research and writing, project management.

- *Cost of planning* - California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) /National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and Environmental Impact Reports require too much money and time.

Stakeholder Outreach: Outreach is currently very limited.

- *Lack of support* - We need to educate our county supervisors on the issues and importance of forest management, fuel projects etc. The North Fork mill is the poor stepchild of the county. They focus their economic development resources in the valley areas.
- *Political boundaries* - “Turf” issues have been an impediment to Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) planning process.

Implementation:

- *Available feedstock* - The resource commitment by US Forest Service (USFS) is an issue. How to produce enough volume on a more consistent basis? The Sierra National Forest is producing 3 million board feet per year. The USFS can’t assure that they can have projects over 1 or 3 years. Alpine Sierra Mills has worked with FS on an agreement to pull saw logs; presently limited to small diameter products with the intention of working out towards saw logs eventually
- *Contracting* - There are barriers between grantor and grantee. Terms of grants need to be clearly explained and understood.
- *Funding for infrastructure* - There is no funding to open wood mills and co-generation plants that have closed here. You have to demonstrate job creation and that is difficult unless you can do good outreach to businesses.
- *The Pacific Fisher* - Listing of this species as endangered could impede work.
- *Litigation*

5. What level of planning needs to go into these goal/activities?N/A

6. What projects are going on currently or in the past? What are the reasons for success or failure of a biomass facility nearby? What is the potential for establishment of a new local biomass or wood products facility?

North Fork mill site redevelopment: There is a lot of potential to develop the North Fork Mill site for resource based economic development. There are two timber oriented businesses on site already. It currently has one business refinishing old lumber. The site is 135 acres. There is plenty of storage and is the only heavy industrially zoned site in eastern Madera. The property has a great fire suppression system with a 300 gallon per minute well. It was given to the community when the mill closed in 1993.

There is potential for woody biomass or water generation there (potable to generate revenue). There have been three or four proposals for the site and one is being explored right now that involves a biomass facility/project using feedstock from USFS and private lands. Hopefully this workshop will help it succeed.

One problem is that the US Forest Service can only guarantee a two year supply for resources to fuel it. There is a landfill in Mariposa that is soon-to-be maxed out and so could possibly dovetail with this idea as an additional use of the facility.

The group recognizes that it is important to ask the community what they want for the site. Community members have suggested an RV park, a native plant park, trails, river parkway, fieldtrips location, cultural sites, shooting range, senior center, housing, wood working shop for local kids, furniture making, pellets, compost and small diameter wood. Any new plant could have an educational component for youth through site visits-- maybe a demonstration garden over site of old dip tank on a mill site. They could use compost from green operation there to plant it. Yosemite National Park has expressed interest in working with them. The group recognized a multi use advantage.

To move forward, this project needs: a feasibility study, incentives through tax breaks or carbon credits, partnerships from downstream users, funding, and technical help

Barriers to success of this project include:

- *Funding* - Funding is needed for feasibility studies. We've had trouble identifying target industries for the site, including biomass businesses. We could use money or technical assistance in this area.
- *Project leadership* - For the North Fork mill site we lost the CDC Executive Director due to lack of general funding for organizations. Now we have a grant administrator, but all real leadership is from volunteers, which is hard on the people and the project.
- *Inconsistent biomass supplies* - Funding for fuel break work is through grants. One approach is to pursue private thru the lumber industry. Private property owners as well as green waste pick up are also a possibility.
- *Transportation costs*

Fuels treatments - There are controlled burns, fuel breaks on roads and around communities, and maintenance of current fuel breaks going on. CalFire is working with the Mariposa County Fire Safe council to establish community defensible areas. CRCD/Fire Safe Council (FSC) is planning 34,000 acres of fuel reduction clearing 421 miles of fire breaks (2402 acres)

To help these treatments succeed, we need:

- *Technical support* - We need technical support for resource based businesses to help them succeed!
- *Training* - Native American crews could be trained to thin around cultural resources locally. Ready Set Go could be involved as they were in Oakhurst.
- *More capacity* - the Mariposa Fire Safe Council has a chipper program with secure funding but it has a long wait list. They need to do maintenance where work was already done. Also the RC & D can help with project collaboration, assist with recruitment and a feasibility study, watershed groups can help with grant writing and the county could help by supporting the fire safe council office.
- *Resources* including money and adequate forest waste materials to support projects
- *Policy support* from state and federal government

Barriers to success of treatments include:

- *Litigation* – Project money used for litigation reduces effectiveness. Environmental groups and the USFS need to come together and hash it out
- *Process* - The USFS states CEQA and NEPA hold them back
- *Capacity* - The USFS can only put out so many projects

7. Who here today can contribute to developing local collaboration?

When the group was asked if they would come back, all said yes.

8. Who is missing from today's discussion?

- California Department of Fish & Game
- Bureau of Land Management
- Pacific Gas & Electric
- Calif. Dept. of Forestry and Fire Protection (Guy Anderson from Mariposa)
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- Watershed representatives
- Eastern Madera Fire Safe Council
- Fuel Industry
- Land owners
- Regulatory agencies
- U.S. Forest Service – (some were there)
- Sierra Pacific Industries, Logging companies – Brett Willis, Sierra Forest – Dave Cooper
- North Fork CDC Board members: Dan Rosemberg, Sandy Chaille, Kirsten Englund
- Scientists/scientific community to weigh in on long range effects on biomass material removal over long term (habitat etc)

9. What are the next steps? There was interest to pursue ideas from today, and put together action plan and meet on Nov 23 to continue dialogue.

- Contact Steve Wilensky to determine best approach for getting started.
- Needed attendees - Cal Fire, PG&E, more Forest Service, and local forest operators, Bureau of Land Management, Mariposa County RCD, watershed groups, County government, Successful foresters such as So Cal Edison, Mike Hubert (Mariposa County RCD). SNC can provide support, meeting support, facilitator and negotiating
- Hold a town hall meeting to update constituents re: plans for biomass plant to serve region once enough progress has been made
- Continue to tap into resources/ main policies/ funding

Are there resources that this community needs that the SNC or partners can provide? Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) could:

- Provide technical experts and facilitation.
- Help reconcile conflicts on projects thereby reducing litigation.
- Continue to work with state and federal agencies to better support these types of projects

US Forest Service needs to:

- Understand that fuels treatment projects won't need to rely on grants and handouts if they have adequate product supply to generate income. This is more sustainable long term.

- Keep contractors - To bid on small diameter FS projects that last a year, it costs only \$150. This makes it easy for contractors to drop contracts and disappear

Miscellaneous Issues:

- Extension of Mariposa Creek Parkway: Grant funding was received to acquire the property. Surveys and staking have been completed. The appraisal will be completed soon. Negotiations for acquisitions of property will commence Jan 2010. But upon completion of acquisitions lot line adjustments will be pursued and grant “close out” will be accomplished. A challenge for this project is that the County does not have funding for on-going maintenance nor does grant funding pay that cost.

Unanswered questions:

- Assistance - Marilyn Lidyoff would like to launch a new business to engage in “pre-suppression activities. Who should she contact to conduct a seminar in the community to provide training on potential business models for implementing mariposa county work?
- Timing of projects - Currently lumber processing and bio mass are far away. The question is which comes first the chicken or the egg? Wouldn't the processing facility need to precede the forest cleaning project?
- Previous work - Paul Vining from North Fork had a grant for grinding forest biomass material. What happened?